WHY RUSSIA WANTS NEW U.S. A-TESTS

By Denis Healey

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BY FAR the most depressing feature of this somber political year has been Russia's behavior at the tri-power Geneva test ban talks. The deadlock is now complete and the world knows that the responsibility for it lies wholly with the Soviet Union. If Nikita Khrushchev had deliberately aimed to undermine the position of those who believe that Russia recognizes a common interest with America in ending the arms race and stopping the spread of atomic weapons, he could scarcely have succeeded more completely.

When the Geneva talks resumed in March the American delegation offered substantial concessions on all six of the points which were still at issue. For weeks the Soviet delegate, Semyon K. Tsarapkin, refused to comment, and when he finally broke his silence it was to reject the Western concessions out of hand and to raise entirely new obstacles of his own—notably, the demand for a "troika" in the council responsible for administering the agreement, which would give the Soviet Union a running veto on the activities of the inspection teams.

True, there were ambiguities in Tsarapkin's statements about the work of these teams, and some Western observers have tried to find grounds for hope. But Khrushchev's June 15 speech to the Russian people was unequivocal: "Control over the observance of a nuclear test ban treaty must be exercised with the participation of representatives of the three existing groups of states—and at that, the representatives of these three groups of states may adopt only agreed decisions."

As if this were not enough, the Kremlin has also insisted that inspection not actually commence until four years after the test ban treaty has been ratified. This would extend the present uncontrolled moratorium on tests to a total of at least seven years. Khrushchev's recent speeches make it clear that he no longer sees much advantage in a test ban agreement as such: "It would not be some kind of a dam to bar the way to an arms race." The Russian Premier has reversed the previous Soviet position and now insists that a test ban must be conditional on other disarmament measures.

The motives behind this fundamental change of Soviet policy remain obscure. It may be that when the Russian leaders came to examine the extent of inspection required to police a test ban they decided that the gains in disarmament were not worth the losses in secrecy. Jerome B. Wiesner, one of President Kennedy's chief scientific advisers, argued along these lines in a recent issue of *Daedalus*.

There is also a good deal of evidence to suggest that a major factor behind the change is Soviet reluctance to seek China's adherence to a test ban treaty at this time. The United States and Britain as yet have not the slightest idea how to obtain the adherence of President de Gaulle to an agreement; and it has always been agreed that a three-power treaty must lapse unless it is signed by all future nuclear powers. But if this is so, it is still surprising that Khrushchev did not seek greater propaganda advantage from the recent French atomic tests. In his June 15 speech, in fact, he went out of his way to explain to his television audience in the Communist bloc that "General de Gaulle says that he wants to have his own nuclear arms so as to enable France to conduct an independent policy."

In any case, there is increasing reason to believe that either Russia or China or both want to carry out atomic weapons tests in the near future, and that they hope to provoke the U.S. into resuming tests first so as to divert the odium from themselves. Khrushchev has given formal notice that he will start testing a series of new Soviet weapons the moment America breaks the existing moratorium. At one stage, Tsarapkin went so far as to say that even another test by France would open the door to Soviet tests.

Russia's evident desire to resume testing should weigh heavily with President Kennedy, it seems to me, in the agonizing decision he now faces on America's test policy. He is already under strong public pressure to resume tests. One can concede a case for smaller warheads to increase America's effective missile strength, although the passion for tiny battlefield atomic weapons seems self-defeating, particularly since the Russians are likely to respond to the use of a 10-ton atomic weapon against their forces with a 20-kiloton weapon against ours if that is the smallest they happen to have available. As for the neutron bomb, even if it proved to be feasible in five or ten years time it is difficult to see what it could add to prospective American strength either for deterrence or defense, although it might seem the best investment for countries which have not yet entered the nuclear arms race.

The American test lobby argues that the U.S. could disarm criticism by testing underground, which would